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His Legacy Lives On . . .

'Uncle' Jesse Is More Than A Memory

By GEORGE KING

For many of the newest residents of Provo, Jesse Knight is hardly more than a name. Although, fortunately, there are still many who can remember him as a striking figure on the white horse and know of all he did to make Provo into the community it is today, time has way of making us forget even the most imposing figures from the past.

The Jesse Knight Building on the BYU campus, which was named in his honor, is now referred to as the "JKB" and many students are not even really aware what the initials stand for.

But the fact is, Jesse Knight was one of the men whose generous donations of land and money made BYU possible. He certainly merits being remembered.

A Mormon Optimist

Jesse Knight was a Mormon optimist. He was the son of Newell Knight, a close friend of the Prophet Joseph Smith. And he was raised barefooted and in breeches in the city of Nauvoo, Ill.

However, he was not always an active member of the LDS Church. As a poor farmer living near Provo, he did not take any part in religious activities.

He himself explained, "I was always in sympathy with the weak or with those who seemed unable to defend themselves.

years (two at the time) and so playful and beautiful." Following his wife's promptings, Jesse finally permitted the Elders of the LDS Church to bless her, and she soon recovered. But the Knight's oldest daughter, Minnie, died from the illness.

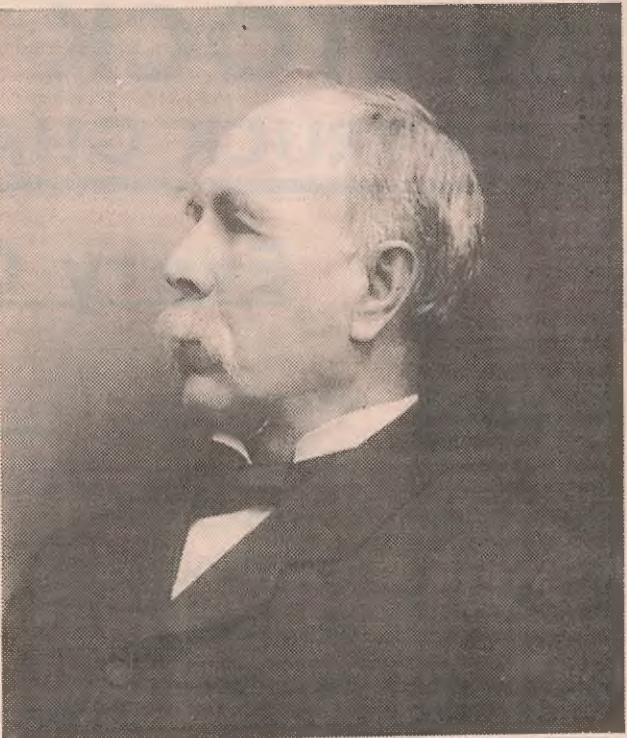
The whole incident had a very profound effect on the farmer Jesse Knight. He made a promise to repay the Lord for his blessings, and later stated, "this promise I faithfully kept."

A Keenly Felt Calling

Jesse Knight keenly felt that he had a calling to help increase the prosperity of the people in the LDS Church. Even before finding the mines that were to help to make him one of Utah's richest citizens, he told his son, "Will, I want to tell you something. We are going to have all the money that we want as soon as we are in a position to handle it properly."

He found a piece of ground that he felt was rich in minerals on the east side of the Godiva mountain near Eureka. But Jared Roundy, an expert miner, disagreed with his opinion. He called the mine a "Humbug," and Jesse optimistically named it that officially.

"Humbug Mine" proved to be far more valuable than its name might indicate, however. Today U.S. geologists have given the limerock in this vicinity the name of "Humbug Lime," in its



"UNCLE" JESSE KNIGHT

the uses he made of his newfound wealth.

"Father realized that he must take care of this wealth that had come to him so suddenly," his son Will reports. "He said many times he was only carrying out a stewardship which had been entrusted to his care."

Helps BYU

Mr. Knight's contributions to

This is the majority of land on which the university is located today.

"Uncle" Jesse's Woolen Mills

One of the many other projects which "Uncle" Jesse, as he came to be called by Provo citizens, undertook for the welfare of the local citizens was the reopening of the Provo Woolen Mills.

woolen mill workers from England and Scotland.

"They had joined the LDS Church, and had come to Provo to work in the factory. Having worked in mills all their lives, they were unable to find other employment that was suited to them. It was compassion for these unemployed workers that was father's main incentive in re-establishing the factory in 1911.

"For eight years the Knight Woolen Mills operated, giving employment to 200 people, but with little or no profit."

Mill Almost Goes Broke

The fact is that, despite the renowned high quality cloth and clothing articles which it produced, the mill wasn't making any money.

As Mrs. Mangum explains, "For years this benefactor (her father, Jesse) drew from his private resources to keep the mills running against the advice and wishes of close business associates."

As Clayton Jenkins explains, "Uncle" Jesse's closest friends were encouraging him to give up the mine, but he was reluctant to do so because he knew what it would do to the over 200 families who depended on the mill as their only means of support.

However, the mill couldn't keep on running at a loss and Mr. Jenkins reports that in 1916 "Uncle" Jesse decided to make one last-ditch attempt to make the mill run at profit. He

\$1,377,000 today.

Only the weaving room was left standing.

"The mill was never the same after that," Clayton Jenkins reports, stating that with the third-rate machinery that it possessed "it was impossible to make it manufacture first-rate goods again. They never attained the same high quality."

Mill Changes Hands

Concurrently, as well, the Knight family lost control of the mill.

J. William Knight, Jesse's son, explains how this happened in this way, "It was a great disappointment to him (Jesse) and other local stockholders when Bishop C. W. Nibley gave an option on the Church's stock in Knight Woolen Mills to Charles Ottenheimer, thus changing the stock control and the directing head of this institution and bringing about its ultimate closing."

Charles Ottenheimer was a respected Jewish merchant from Salt Lake City. He ran a successful clothing factory there which produced high quality men's shirts, and was glad for the chance to gain controlling interest in the reputable Knight's Woolen Mills which had produced clothing of high quality for so long.

However, not only had the quality of the mill's clothing been markedly decreased as a result of the fire, but the mill had lost the large majority of its

Because I felt that some Latter-day Saints in early days were prejudiced against the few non-Mormons who were among us, I was often in sympathy with the outsiders."

Gold Is Found

The mine's first strike was made in August, 1896. The second shipment of ore sent to the United States Smelting company brought a return of \$11,189.05. And this was just the beginning. With the new wealth, Jesse bought other mines and invested in other properties. During his career, Jesse became a multi-millionaire.

An Important Incident

However an incident soon occurred that changed his mind and built his faith. His whole family became sick after drinking well water which had been poisoned by a dead rat. The youngest daughter, Jennie, was near death. As his son Will writes, "she was the idol of the whole family, being of tender

the Brigham Young University are just one example of the many ways in which he used his wealth to benefit the community of Provo.

The Jesse Knight family donated \$65,000 to the Brigham Young University to help build the Maeser Memorial building, the first structure on University Hill.

In 1907 Uncle Jesse deeded a tract of 500 acres of land on the Provo Bench to the Brigham Young University. At a later date 40 acres in addition were given to the school by the same donor.

After it had been built under the direction, and thanks to the contributions of Brigham Young and A. O. Smoot, the mill had run successfully for about 25 years, but, near 1910, the financial situation forced the closing of the mill.

Jesse's youngest daughter, Jenny, who is now Mrs. Lester Mangum, and lives at 3035 Mohave Lane, explains the incidents that prompted Jesse to re-open the Mill in this way, "About 150 workers were thrown out of employment. Of this number, most were trained

to close down the factory at last.

Trys to Rescue Mill

In order to save the mill, Jesse brought in his longtime friend and trouble shooter, John S. Smith. "If he can't get the mill running right, I'll close it," Mr. Jenkins quoted Jesse Knight as saying.

On July 30 of 1918, the disastrous fire wiped out the mill almost completely. The total loss was recorded by Mrs. Mangum and local newspapers at \$504,000 or an equivalent of

customers because of the war. When the mill had been taken over by the government in 1917, it had been forced to ignore the many customers who demanded supplies. Now that the war was over, it was hard for the mill to gain them back.

As a result of this, and the growing competition in the manufacturing of cloth and clothing, the mill was forced to close its doors in May of 1930. Although the ultimate cut in employment had been made as gradually as possible, almost 200 men lost their jobs.

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